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ABSTRACT

The Jersey City (New Jersey) Public Schools became the first school district in the United States to be taken over and fully operated by a state agency on October 4, 1989. This paper presents findings of a study that examined the first 2 years during which the takeover was implemented, with a focus on the internal and external forces that affected implementation. Findings indicate that state intervention in local school districts has not developed spontaneously and in isolation at state levels. Second, state takeover is perceived as the ultimate reform initiative; however, the internal barriers to successful reform continue to exist after intervention. Third, states tend to take a one-dimensional bureaucratic approach to educational accountability and school improvement, which will not bring about the systemic changes needed to reverse failing school districts. Fourth, the new leadership must understand the structural, political, cultural, and human dimensions of the organization. Finally, a predominantly interpersonal/managerial/collaborative leadership style is best suited to address the issues of an intervention and an organization like the Jersey City Public Schools. The paper concludes with seven policy recommendations, eight planning-and-management recommendations, and eight leadership recommendations. (LMI)

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STATE INTERVENTION IN LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS: EDUCATIONAL SOLUTION OR POLITICAL PROCESS?

by Eloise M. Forster, Ed.D.

INTRODUCTION

Nationwide, the inability of the system of public education to reverse the continuing failure of local school districts, particularly in urban areas, has led to a lack of public confidence, an increasing demand for educational accountability, and extreme action such as state intervention in local school district operations. The relationship between public school education and the social, political and economic decline of our cities has also become prominent as an overriding public concern and an issue of grave importance. It is all too clear that the decline of our major urban centers has surpassed the critical stage, and that a renaissance of our once flourishing cities is impossible without a public education system capable of achieving academic excellence for the children who reside in them. The ability of urban school districts to reverse their pattern of failure thus surfaces as a serious issue closely related to that of state intervention.

Given the continued failure of most educational reforms, inducements and sanctions at the hands of local school authorities, the ultimate intervention - - - the takeover and full operation of failing school districts by the state - - - has become a major educational and political issue in the last decade. Viewed as a vehicle to bring about the changes required to turn a failing school district around, state takeover continues to be debated as a necessary intervention. Too many state- and federal-initiated reforms, whether mandated or incentive-driven, have not provided remedies for the continuing failure of school districts and low student achievement. Though there may be a number of factors contributing to the poor results of various reforms, there is overwhelming evidence that most of them fail due to poor

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understanding of, and attention to, the context within which the reforms are occurring and shortcomings in their planning and implementation. The reforms may have promise and the intent may be noble, but the results predictably fall short of the desired goal based upon inattention to the most fundamental concepts of organizational behavior and the change process. In the final analysis, public education, particularly in the urban centers, finds itself in a revolving door of educational reforms and a pernicious cycle of failure. When various educational reform efforts have not worked under an existing structure, one then looks at changing that structure in an attempt to bring about successful implementation of needed reforms. State takeover of a local school district is viewed as a major reform initiative - - - a catalyst for educational change and improvement intended to break the failure cycle. It is a means to an end, not an end unto itself - - - a point which is critical to one maintaining proper perspective on the topic and understanding both its potential and its limitations.

To date, there is limited research on the topic of school district takeover. State takeovers have been initiated only in a few states within the last six years. Their implementation in a limited number of school districts, each under different conditions, has yielded no conclusive research findings to support their effectiveness in reversing school district failure and improving student achievement. The study upon which this article is based was designed to begin to fill that void. The rationale for conducting the study was based upon the need to investigate the viability of state takeover as an intervention that could reverse the continuing failure of school districts which are unwilling and/or unable to self-improve. The study's purpose was to document and analyze the events and activities of a school district takeover, and to provide information and insight which would be useful to policymakers, administrators, and state and local educational agencies considering state takeover of local districts as a solution to continued school district failure. This information consists of the data and findings from field research and

qualitative analysis as well as a review of related literature and research which focused on educational reform, issues related to policy and implementation of state intervention in local school districts, and organizational management and behavior.

The Jersey City (New Jersey) Public Schools became the first school district in the nation to be taken over and fully operated by a state agency on October 4, 1989. The study described, analyzed, and interpreted the implementation of the takeover of this large urban district during the first two years (1989-1991) as to governance, organization, and management with a focus on the internal and external forces which impact implementation. The author, a member of the four person state-appointed administrative "intervention team", was a participant-observer immersed in the field for the first five years of the takeover of the Jersey City Public Schools. The author, therefore, is in a position to formulate knowledgeable opinions on the topic based not only on the study which focused on the first two years of the takeover, but also on the events which occurred thereafter.

The author used qualitative research methodology in the event-focused, descriptive analytical study. An intent of the study, beyond documenting and describing events and activities which occurred during implementation of the takeover, was to describe and interpret the cultural context of the organization. It was a proposition of the author that an understanding of the organization's culture was fundamental to understanding the implications for implementation of a takeover of a local school district. The organization's cultural context was also viewed as critical to determining the capacity of the district to be transformed in order to implement substantive changes which would endure after the district is returned to local control. The interpretation and analysis of descriptive data from the study provided insight into the cultural reality of the organization and the context in which implementation occurred.

This article provides a brief conceptual background of state takeover based upon relevant

literature and research, a summary of major findings and conclusions of the study, a summary of major recommendations for policymaking and implementation, and a brief retrospective which discusses the author's reflections on events which occurred subsequent to the timeframe of the study. Its intent is to inform the field of education about the controversial issue of state takeover as a catalyst for educational reform and the specific issues and problems related to the intervention itself. The article may act as a basis for assumptions regarding the types of problems encountered during a takeover and the potential of takeover as a viable method for reversing the continuing failure of school districts. However, one will only be able to speculate about the success of state intervention because of the study's focus on the first two years of the takeover. In Jersey City, even after five years, it is too soon to determine complete success or failure of the takeover as an intervention which brings about effective reform or direct educational benefit to students as evidenced by quantitative indicators of increased student achievement. The determination of the ultimate success of the takeover in a five to ten year period is surely a topic worthy of subsequent study.

BACKGROUND

It is important for one to understand that state intervention has not developed in isolation at state levels but is rather an outgrowth of numerous reform attempts which have failed, and of a larger movement of educational reform and school improvement which goes beyond our national boundaries. Internationally, governments have been seeking ways to address their failing educational systems. The primary significance of the international movement is that it has provided a momentum to a trend for greater and greater control from national levels to set standards and improve public education at local levels. School district takeover as a strategy for reversing the cycle of failure where local authorities have been unsuccessful will likely continue to take on greater significance within the larger context of educational reform

until public expectations for student achievement are met. It is important to note that the major thrust for educational accountability, reform and intervention has not emanated from the field of education but rather from governmental and business sectors. This is a significant factor in the evolution of state intervention as an educational solution with even greater significance in the process for its development as an educational policy and reform initiative.

State intervention policy has been developed and enacted as a result of historical, political and educational conditions in the United States. Historically, the nation has experienced increasing federal and state involvement in educational reform and local school improvement in the last three decades. There were visible shifts from the concern for "equity in education" in the 1960s to "excellence in education" which reached its peak in the 1980s. The "excellence in education movement" brought with it a significant increase in state-level legislation, regulations and mandates to improve education and hold districts accountable for results in the form of meeting state standards or facing sanctions.

At the political level, the country joined the international trend for greater governmental control of educational systems. During the 1980s, the strong desire for accountability in education was fueled by political rhetoric and national reports, such as A Nation At Risk in 1983, which created public concern and instilled fear about the nation's failing educational system and the inablilty of the public schools to produce a workforce which would enable the country to continue to compete as an economic and world power. Economic prosperity and national security became closely linked with educational excellence. Business leaders and state governors joined the federal administration in voicing concern regarding school failure and demanding greater educational accountability. Dwindling resources and increasing demands for public services and lower taxes added to the political atmosphere at national and state levels which pressed for educational accountablity and positive results. Social

issues regarding racism and poverty provided additional pressure, and special interest groups such as teacher unions became increasingly involved in policy issues as the government appeared to be taking greater control of their profession.

In the educational sphere, many school districts were suffering from a lack of public confidence, poor student performance, and failure of numerous educational reforms to bring about school improvement and higher levels of student achievement. The problems were more severe in poor urban and rural districts where economic and social issues increase the demands on school districts and communities. The educational gap was not closing between disadvantaged students and their more advantaged counterparts. Educational systems responded to increased governmental demands for accountability and results primarily by attempting to blindly comply with state mandates and implementing piecemeal or incremental reforms which did not substantively change and improve existing systems. Demands for accountability encouraged application of bureaucratic principles to educational organizations which increased regulations, monitoring, and state-determined standards for effective schools and student performance, thus setting the stage for sanctions if standards were not met by local school districts. State intervention became the ultimate sanction if a school district continued to fail to meet state standards, and policymakers turned to their legislative powers to adopt laws which would allow such intervention when lesser sanctions failed to bring about the desired improvement.

Frontrunners in the enactment of takeover laws have been New Jersey, Kentucky and Massachusetts. The state educational agencies in New Jersey and Kentucky first used the authority provided by these laws to take over and operate local school districts in their states in 1989 and 1991 respectively, and Massachusetts permitted the Chelsea schools to be operated by Boston University which acted as a state agent in a unique contractual agreement in 1989. Since the takeover of the Jersey City Public Schools in 1989, New Jersey has taken over a second

urban district, the Paterson Public Schools, and is currently moving closer to a takeover of its largest district, the urban Newark Public Schools, which has managed to avoid state takeover since 1968 when a former governor first noted its deterioration and recommended state intervention. At the time, the legislature rejected the governor's request for enabling legislation to permit intervention. It wasn't until twenty years later that the New Jersey legislature passed a law which enabled the state to takeover and operate local school districts which continually failed to meet state standards.

The policy focus of this article is on New Jersey's "Takeover Law", passed in 1988, which enabled the takeover of the Jersey City Public Schools. In sum, key elements of New Jersey's "Takeover Law" authorizes the State Board of Education and State Department of Education to: takeover and completely operate a school district; replace top administrative staff with a state-appointed administrative team; replace the existing board of education with a non-voting advisory body of which thirteen members are appointed by the Commissioner of Education and two by the mayor; vest the legal authority of a board of education in a state-appointed superintendent of schools; abolish all central administrative positions within six months of the takeover and restructure the organization; and evaluate all principals within twelve months of the takeover and bring tenure charges for inefficiency where warranted. The statute provided for the takeover to be in effect for a five year period with an additional year for transition if, at that time, the district has met state standards and can be returned to local control. If state standards are not met, the state may remain in control of the district until such time that the state standards are achieved. Currently, the legislature is considering modifications to the Takeover Law based upon the experiences of the takeover and State-operation of the Jersey City and Paterson school districts.

ISSUES RELATED TO POLICY

Major issues confronting states which embark on a plan to intervene in failing school districts fall primarily into three categories: legal, political, and educational.

Legally, education is a function of state government pursuant to state constitution, and the state has the power to intervene through legislation. The state is responsible for providing necessary direction and adequate technical resources to local school districts though the extent of that responsibility is less clear and the topic of continual debate. Local districts want assistance from the state as they deem appropriate and necessary, and they feel that the state is particularly obligated to assist them with resources for any actions that the state is requiring that they take. If the state mandates programs or improvements which require financial support, local districts generally must bear the cost and are reluctant to do so. They view this as an additional financial burden which is imposed upon them, and they are unrelenting in their fight for financial assistance from the state, particularly if they have been taken over by it.

In some states direction from the state level has taken the form of excessive control of the local educational process through regulation and sanction. The key arguments in the political arena on this issue center on: (1) the extent of the state's direction to local school districts; and (2) the state's ability to set standards, impose them on local school districts, and ultimately use them as a basis to determine educational failure, sanctions, and the need for intervention in local district operations. **The overriding issue, state vs. local control, makes state intervention essentially a political issue, not an educational issue. In reality, issues related to state intervention are primarily about power and control, not education of children.**

School districts and local communities do not want to lose control of their schools. State intervention is a threat to the existing system, power bases and interest groups at local levels

as well as to their affiliates at state and national levels. Local board of education members do not want to be removed or have their role in the governance structure diminished in any way. **Policymaking is power.** Local administrators fear for their jobs. **High-ranking positions are power.** Unions fear the impact on job security and greater control from a top-down state bureaucracy when they seek more participation in local decision-making. Unions often also enjoy a position of influence in policymaking and personnel decisions which is threatened. **Influence is power.** Local government officials do not want to lose control of their political links and influence within the school district which often provides a source of political support and patronage for them. Cases of political intrusion have been documented in numerous districts across the nation. **Patronage is power.** Even when patronage is not an issue, the ability to influence or control the school budget is a critical factor which local government officials do not want to relinquish. **Money is power.**

The threat to individuals and interest groups is not confined to the local level. The informal political network which survives on favors and "getting to the right people" becomes prominent as individuals move to protect their jobs, or those of others, and their various positions in the power network of the district and community. More overtly, local interest groups make appeals to, and receive support from, their respective affiliates at state and national levels. Lobbying with state legislators can be vigorous. **Votes are power.** Beyond the natural loyalty and reciprocal support of affiliated groups, self-interest again plays a major role in the debate to retain the existing system. Fear of the loss of power at local levels permeates throughout the state and nation with various interest groups asking the question, "If state intervention occurs in this district, will we be next?" The end result is a deluge of opinions and concerns creating an active arena of debate. These opinions, though shrouded in words about children and democratic principles related to independence and "taxation without

representation", are typically more closely connected with self-preservation and personal gain. The focus is not on shared interests and compatible solutions. The debate is mainly about protecting vested interests, and the players relentlessly negotiate their respective positions with vehemence. **Position is power.**

The ongoing debates and struggles to retain or gain power and control have tremendous implications for policy development related to state intervention and educational reform. The policy, after having gone through the negotiations and compromises inherent in the political process, will in final form likely be quite different from its original design and purpose. The resulting policy, if it survives at all, is often a mutant of its original form and intent, diluted to the point where it can initiate actions by virtue of its passage as law but leaves the power to ensure its success at the doorstep of implementation. The result is often another long battle to remove the impediments to change by administrative means with critical areas which could only have been addressed through legislation remaining intact. The resulting situation, when the roar of the political arena subsides, does not lend itself to swift, optimally effective educational solutions. The end result is a hard fought, lingering battle which cannot achieve the full spirit of the policy unless it is willing to place the priority on the interests of children and not succumb to the compromises negotiated by special interest groups.

Participation in the decision-making process is a source of continual debate at all levels and a primary political issue related to policy development. Locally, members of the community and staff want to be a part of decision-making from the outset to determine whether, and to what extent, intervention should occur in a school district. After intervention occurs, the desire to participate in the decision-making process intensifies as individuals and groups voice their "right" as members of the school district and community to have "a say" in their schools. Though state intervention may establish and maintain mechanisms to provide opportunities for

community involvement in the decision-making process, the fact that the state has assumed control of the district makes involvement in decision-making a "cause celebre". The issue, for the most part, is more about the relinquishing of local control and loss of power than about involvement of constituencies for purposes of collaborative and productive problem-solving. Though decision-making may not have been an open process prior to state takeover, having been typically confined to a small number of groups or individuals who periodically changed depending upon the political shifts of the community, the battle for involvement in decision-making before and after takeover is never-ending. It is part of the political process whereby individuals and groups continually jockey to achieve new positions of influence, or regain or strengthen old ones. This becomes apparent as the players inevitably identify themselves in their continued attempts to maintain the old rules in a new game which they refuse to acknowledge or accept.

Major educational issues related to state intervention focus on the inability or unwillingness of school districts to improve themselves for educational purposes, their failure to improve student performance, and the type and extent of external assistance needed to reverse their failure. The issues become more complex, and the debates more fierce, regarding poor urban and rural districts because of the social issues involving poverty and race. Educational institutions tend to be resistant to change, particularly systemic change. Their organizational nature and structure makes them intractable to significant changes and substantive reform. Historically, educational institutions have difficulty achieving universal agreement on the goals and standards for teaching, learning and student performance, and therefore have equal difficulty agreeing on what changes should occur to improve schooling. The debate regarding who should determine these goals and standards, and what they should be, never ends because of competing ideologies and interest groups who continually press for their particular position on

the subject. The structure and culture of educational institutions, and the strong internal and external political forces, make goal consensus and joint action toward common goals difficult if not impossible to attain. Educational goals and standards dictated from a higher authority, such as the national or state government, guarantee no greater consensus or acceptance than if they were determined at the local level. In fact, mandated goals and standards will likely meet greater resistance as they are imposed in top-down fashion. In spite of such resistance, when faced with regulations and sanctions, compliance with the state's mandates tends to become a district priority, but implementation of practices to achieve compliance typically suffers because the necessary foundation for understanding and acceptance has not been properly laid. Additionally, the preoccupation with compliance to state standards diverts the district's focus and resources from substantive educational reforms and practices which more likely would result in improved student achievement. Contrary to the intent of educational accountability as an cornerstone of educational reform initiatives, a commitment to externally imposed goals and standards, particularly in districts which are threatened by state sanctions, rarely goes beyond the act of adhering to the regulations and meeting the standards as ends unto themselves.

Given the state's emphasis on accountability for meeting state standards, reform efforts by school districts tend to generally be superficial, prioritizing compliance with regulations and rarely getting to the heart of the system, organizationally or educationally. In spite of tremendous time and effort to comply with state regulations and meet state standards, many school districts thereby continue to falter. Some improvement may be seen in operational areas which are relatively easy to change and measure progress but significant improvement in student achievement is less common. In actuality, accountability for educational results merely becomes a check mark on a list of state monitoring standards with no other mechanism to achieve the changes required at the core of the educational system - - - the teaching and

learning process. **The only way that student performance can be significantly improved in any district is to focus on the quality of the process of teaching and learning in the school and classroom, and on those factors which directly impede that process. State accountability policies and systems must be prepared to establish standards to address issues of quality related to instructional delivery so that the impact is felt at the point where students are most directly involved in the learning process.** States tend to ignore the basic importance of the quality of the learning environment, teacher performance, instruction, and the learning process in the policy jargon of accountability and results.

The primary question which must be asked and answered by policymakers is whether the demand for accountability for educational results, as typically equated with meeting state standards, can improve the quality of education and student performance in local school districts. Central to this question is the way the state defines the problem. States tend to define the problem of failing school districts in bureaucratic terms, such as "bureaucratic inefficiency" and "educational bankruptcy". In the interest of "accountability", technical standards are applied as measures of educational performance without consideration for the unique nature of educational institutions, the technology of teaching, child development, and the learning process. Therefore, the state's definition of the problem and resultant proposed solutions may address the demand for accountability at some bureaucratic level but will not provide the solutions that would bring about the improvement in student achievement which the public seeks. Regulation, monitoring, and intervention alone do not result in improved student performance. If state intervention is to result in higher student achievement, the state's approach must consider how it defines educational accountability with regard to the interests of children and the learning process, particularly in urban districts. It must also determine the

extent to which it is willing and able to move beyond the political rhetoric of accountability, bureaucratic efficiency, and technical standards and solutions to substantive educational and organizational actions which directly impact learning and will improve the long-run performance of a school district and its students.

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study which forms the basis for this article focused on the takeover of the Jersey City Public Schools. The author, however, believes that the findings have something significant to say about similar organizational settings and circumstances and therefore have applicability to comparable situations.

The political nature of the community and the school district have a major impact on the people in the organization and its culture. Organizational issues and problems are internal and external to the district and are the direct result of the human, political and cultural aspects of the organization and community. The cultural context of the Jersey City Public Schools was largely an outgrowth of its highly political environment. Municipal politics and political intrusion in the school district were recurring themes. Favoritism and reprisals in the form of rewards and punishments were blatant. Power and access to power, not vested authority and expertise, made people influential. The ability to perform favors and control access to jobs, money-making opportunities, or desireable educational programs provided a power base even for persons who would appear to have relatively little influence in the formal organization of the district. The unions, particularly the teachers' union, were extremely powerful political forces in the district and community with their influence spanning far beyond protection of employee rights and collective bargaining to being a notable force in personnel decisions and municipal elections.

Competing special interest groups and power networks were numerous. Affiliations with

individuals or groups were extremely important. Automatic sorting processes in the district and community occurred in general patterns which were significant in understanding the informal structure and political dynamics of the organization. Sorting occurred by job or school assignment; neighborhood and political affiliations; cliques and networks; parent organization affiliation; community, religious or business organizations; and unions. Political affiliation generally transcended racial, ethnic and religious differences though the undercurrent of issues regarding race, ethnicity, and religion remained strong and constant. These sub-groups periodically surfaced when particular individuals or groups appeared to need protection and support at times when race, ethnicity, or religion became a real or perceived issue; or when race, ethnicity, or religion could be used to gain some political advantage.

The local media and informal networks were forces which controlled information. Access to information was power, and information was skillfully used by members in the organization and community. Rumors ran rampant; "leaks" to the media were numerous; anonymous letters and telephone calls were common; and speeches, whether relevant to issues at hand or not, were routine in order to obtain a forum for one's views. Information was not readily shared, was often fragmented and sometimes deliberately buried. Exclusive knowledge and information gaps enabled individuals to protect their positions of influence and create a situation whereby the simplest organizational functions became pieces in a large jigsaw puzzle. It was virtually impossible to see the whole picture in a labyrinth of distorted channels of communication and a fragmented trail of information.

The organization tended to be continually embroiled in controversy and conflict primarily due to the ongoing struggle by interest groups and individuals to gain or regain an advantage in the perpetual struggle for influence, power and survival. The informal organization dominated the formal organization, rendering it dysfunctional as its members

continually reacted to the dynamic forces in their environment. The political dimension was the primary cause for organizational dysfunction as opposed to the more simplistic bureaucratic reasons attributed by the state, such as mismanagement. The irrationality of the political dimension of the community and the organization twisted or severed the typical lines of authority and responsibility one would expect to see on an organizational chart.

The organization and community tended to be extremely inward and suspicious of "outsiders". People openly discouraged involvement of anyone other than members of the organization and community in local matters. There was a general acceptance that "this is the way things are done here", and that other people could not understand the district and community unless they were "one of us". Outsiders were a threat to the status quo and the formal and informal systems. They also became competitors for jobs in what had essentially been a closed shop. A contributing factor to the inward nature of the community and district is the lack of mobility out of the community and district. Many residents and employees have never lived or worked anyplace else. There were also numerous district "families" consisting of husbands and wives; parents and children; in-laws; aunts, uncles and cousins; and ex-spouses cutting across all categories and levels of staff. District "families" frequently also had close ties with local businesses and groups which were prominent in the community. It was not unusual for an individual to be in a position to favor relatives or family friends in personnel and other actions.

It has been established that, through policymaking, the power of the state to intervene enables it to take over and operate a local school district. Once the takeover has occurred, however, that power becomes neutralized by the politics and culture of the district. In a relatively short period of time, the state's intervention team finds itself operating a district with no extraordinary means, trying to get extraordinary results. In the case of the Jersey City Public Schools, the "Takeover Law" immediately eliminated two sources of political

interference in the district. By abolishing the mayor-appointed Board of Education and the top administrative positions, particularly in the area of personnel, interference from City Hall and the powerful teachers' union in the governance and operation of the district was under control. Patronage and nepotism in personnel and financial decisions ended. The power of the Board of Education was neutralized as they were now non-voting and advisory in nature. The state intervention team did not have to "play ball" with City Hall, the Board of Education, and the unions as was the case with previous administrations. With these major problems eliminated, the state intervention team's greatest challenge came from the organization's culture, a culture so strong that people in it automatically continued to function according to "business as usual" even after the old power and authority structures were disrupted by the takeover. The cultural context of the organization revealed what was important to the organization's members, and provided insight into what they believed and what drove their behavior.

Survival, jobs and power emerged as the predominant cultural themes in the organization. Those themes were the essence of the culture which controlled the organization and the individuals in it. The themes were so strong and controlling that they permeated every dimension of the organization, creating a **"survival culture"**. The primary beliefs of the organization's members developed within a formal and informal system of reward and punishment. Historically, they had to worry about personal survival in the organization. Favors, fear and intimidation were used to control the organization and the people in it. The district's internal and external political forces created a climate of personal and professional uncertainty. Security, particularly related to jobs, was a dominant concern. Within this environment, the most basic human needs of the organization's members emerged as their priority. Most behavior was driven by survival and interpreted through this lens.

The preoccupation with survival tacitly relegated the education of children to a lower

level of the organization's belief system, a system which worked against the majority of the members who were competent and sincerely wanted to do their jobs in a way that would put the education of children first. Even when great strides had been made by individuals to provide beneficial programs and services to students, such efforts could easily be derailed by arbitrary actions related to political, rather than educational, decisions. Most of the time and energy of the organization's members was sapped by following the organization's informal rules for survival. The preoccupation with survival created too many distractions from their daily work and hindered their ability to optimally focus on their primary mission. It was extremely difficult for individuals to avoid such distractions because of the highly irrational, political nature of the organizational climate. One never knew when the proverbial axe would fall.

The system of cultural beliefs was so strong that the clash between the old beliefs and the new became the major obstacle to change and improvement after the takeover. Organizational transformation from the old "survival culture" to a new culture was required to enable the education of children to dominate as the primary belief and priority of the organization's members and drive their behavior to that end. The new culture would need to establish a climate of stability and security where the organization's members would be able to focus on their work and their educational mission, not on the activities needed for personal survival in the organization.

The creation of a new culture does not happen incidentally. It requires a carefully planned approach to organizational transformation and development. However, a strategy to ensure such transformation, one which acknowledged the human, political and cultural aspects of the organization, was not included in the intervention policy or process. Instead, the state defined the problem solely in terms of political interference and bureaucratic inefficiency, and it developed a policy which applied only structural solutions to complex organizational

problems. As a result, pursuant to the "Takeover Law", intervention during the first two years focused on implementing structural changes, which addressed the bureaucratic inefficiency of the district, with no specific provision or strategy to address the district's human, political and cultural dimensions.

The state intervention team, as the district's new leadership, would have had to play a key role in moving beyond the mandated structural activities of the "Takeover Law". The intervention team would have to analyze the organization, refocus its goals, and provide the leadership and management necessary to achieve cultural transformation as well as bureaucratic efficiency. The team's approach to the organization was extremely important. For some members of the organization, it would not make any difference who the team members were or what they did. They would be "outsiders", "strangers", and "intruders" no matter what. For others who viewed the takeover as an opportunity for positive change, the intervention team had to demonstrate that it was "worthy of following", "competent", and "human". The members of the intervention team in Jersey City each demonstrated different styles in their approach to the organization, and the organization's members expressed specific feelings regarding those differences in leadership style and the impact on the organization. The importance of leadership and personal style in approaching and managing any organization is understood, but it is particularly evident in regard to a school district takeover which requires the delicate handling of people and an organization which has been traumatized and needs to be rebuilt from its core.

SUMMARY OF MAJOR CONCLUSIONS

Based upon the review of related literature and research, and the findings of the study, the author has drawn five major conclusions which are relevant to policy development and implementation related to state intervention.

First, state intervention in local school districts has not developed spontaneously and in

isolation at state levels. It is an outgrowth of a long history of numerous unsuccessful attempts at educational reform in failing school districts and a steady decrease in public confidence in the system of public education. The time and conditions were right by the late 1980s for states to takeover local school districts with less political risk than they had to face previously. Policymakers could champion a cause and assume a position as saviors of children and the country using intervention in failing local school districts as an unavoidable action, brought upon by the district itself as a result of its unwillingness and/or inability to self-improve. Though the problems in failing school districts may have been partly attributable to broader social and educational issues, particularly in the urban centers, the response of the states was primarily support for a single direct action, that of taking over a school district and operating it more efficiently. However, urban education's broader problems still needed to be addressed and urban communities rebuilt. This was a much larger order for state policymakers, with the potential for major political ramifications. It was essentially easier and safer politically to take direct action against single school districts than to develop a statewide plan which would address the problems of urban communities and urban education thereby requiring a redistribution of resources and serious discussion related to sensitive social and political issues. Unless state legislators broaden their strategy to include the full range of problems faced by urban districts, a school district takeover is little more than a symbolic political act which only gives the illusion of fixing the problem. Such action, though perhaps necessary, is restricted to the operation of the district and provides no additional measures which would address the broader issues confronting the community within which the district functions. Unless the broader issues are addressed by the state, the impact of intervention in single districts, taken over one at a time, will be negligible; and the plight of urban education in the state will not improve. The author can only speculate that any improvements resulting from the intervention itself will

struggle to survive and, once the district is returned to local control, will ultimately succumb to the same issues which originally created the need for state intervention.

Though the broader issues related to urban education must be addressed in order to truly improve the human condition and schooling for children, intervention is an important weapon for the state to have in its arsenal when all else has failed. There are far too many districts which are unable and/or unwilling to improve themselves. The forces working against a reversal of failure in the existing systems of those districts are far too great, rendering them incapable of self-analyzing and dealing with those forces in ways that would enable them to self-improve. Often the community is poor, the environment is highly political, and the problems are deeply systemic. The author has no doubts that "business as usual" would continue in such districts without state intervention. A state takeover does break the cycle and provide an opportunity for a district to improve under a new leadership. The extent of that improvement is largely dependent upon the support provided by the state, and the skill and ability of the new district leadership to manage the internal and external forces which impact the organization, including those at the state level where the political dynamics also have a direct bearing on the implementation of the intervention.

Second, state takeover is perceived as the ultimate reform initiative. However, the internal barriers to successful reform, those which caused previous reform efforts to fail, still exist after a district is taken over. There is no magic in a takeover. The complexities of implementing improvements are just as great, if not greater, after the takeover. There is abundant evidence that educational reform efforts meet numerous obstacles in the political and legal arenas, and that it is the staff and culture of the organization which hold the key to systemic change and improvement. The culture does not change simply because it has been taken over. If anything, the existing culture is likely to be strengthened given the traumatic and

threatening nature of a takeover. If the culture prevented improvement before takeover, it will continue to be an impediment until it begins its transformation to a new culture which has the capability of committing to, and working toward, a common educational mission.

Implementation occurs within the context of the organization when a state agency takes over a school district. The organizational issues related to implementation of a takeover emerge within this context and within the broader context of the local community and the state. State intervention does not occur in isolation of the external and internal environment of a local school district. The organizational context, therefore, must be considered when planning and implementing a takeover of a school district. The policymakers and educational practitioners must anticipate the problems and gain understanding of important organizational and community issues and characteristics which could determine the success or failure of the intervention.

Third, states tend to take a bureaucratic approach to educational accountability and school improvement. The states set standards, monitor, provide technical assistance and intervene when standards are not achieved. Defining the problem as "educational bankruptcy", states take the local school district and community through a type of bankruptcy procedure similar to that used for businesses which have failed. Ignoring the organizational differences between businesses and educational institutions, the states perpetuate the metaphor and approach school improvement as a problem of improving bureaucratic efficiency. In policy and practice, the state applies bureaucratic solutions to educational organizations which present an array of complex issues not generally faced by businesses. The bureaucratic approach emphasizes structural solutions to complex organizational problems. This one-dimensional approach will not bring about the systemic changes needed to reverse failing school districts and improve student performance.

Organizational restructuring after takeover must be carefully considered. A centralized

restructuring strategy alone, as an initial step in the intervention process, does not treat the schools and instruction as the immediate priority. Further, restructuring subjects the organization to tremendous conflict resulting from the anxiety it creates in its members and the requisite shifts in the authority and governance structures. Power and control become major issues and potential barriers to the success of restructuring as a reform strategy because of the resultant shifts in power and authority, particularly in a highly political environment. The policymakers must consider the potential problems and complexities of restructuring in the development and implementation of the intervention policy. They must consider the side- and after-effects of applying rational/structural solutions to a highly irrational, political system. The policy must provide more latitude and time to the state intervention team in order to adjust to circumstances to minimize the conflict and related problems which can be anticipated when restructuring, and to enable them to address school-level improvement strategies sooner. The intervention policy must be developed with sufficient consideration for implementation of the mandated activities and timelines, legal issues, and provision for appropriate fiscal and technical resources to support the intervention. Given the magnitude of the task, the scope of the policy must be broad enough to provide sufficient managerial latitude to the intervention team and enough time for activities to be planned and implemented which will begin cultural transformation of the district.

Fourth, the key to understanding any organization lies in understanding its human and social dimensions. An organization does not operate in isolation of broader social and political norms. Most urban districts function as highly political organizations reflecting a larger community where politics and use of favors, rewards and punishments are the norm. Since implementation occurs within the context of the organization, it is important that the new leadership takes a multi-perspective view of the organization. This view considers the

structural, human, political, and cultural dimensions of the organization and their implications for management and leadership. The state's technical definition of the problem resulted in identification of technical problems with resultant technical solutions. In urban districts in particular, the human, political and cultural dimensions of the organization are as important, if not more so, than the structural dimension in bringing about change and improvement. The structural approach alone will not work. No approach addressing a single dimension will. The multi-perspective approach requires that all four dimensions be given appropriate consideration when attempting to reform, transform, and manage a complex organization.

In using a multi-perspective approach, it is particularly important to understand the culture of the organization, the human dimension, and the interrelationship between the structure and the people. Transforming an organization for substantive reform requires continual cultural interpretation and re-interpretation by the leadership, not just restructuring and efficient management. It is possible, by delineating the critical characteristics of the culture, to plan and manage an organizational culture, implement changes, and improve organizational effectiveness. In order to accomplish this, the new leadership has to believe in the importance of organizational culture, study and analyze it, and develop a strategy to transform the organization by developing the new set of values, beliefs and norms required to achieve the new vision. It would have to systematically negate those characteristics of the old culture which focused people on jobs, power and survival by establishing an organizational climate which meets the basic human needs of the organization's members, particularly security, thereby enabling them to refocus on the organization's primary mission: the education of children. The organization's members would have to feel secure enough to shift the focus of their existence in the organization from survival and self-interest to the interests of children.

Fifth, how the new leadership approaches the organization and its members is critically

important. The leaders must gain control and commitment, create an organizational climate that promotes problem-solving and productivity, and develop a healthy organizational atmosphere which meets the self-actualization needs as well as the basic human needs of the members. In order to do this, the new leaders must understand organizational behavior, unlock the culture, and believe in the importance of both leading and managing the organization through a transformation to an effective educational institution. They must understand how individuals react to situations and events, attempt to see them from their perspective and understand how they feel. It is important for the leadership to understand the organization's culture in order to gain insight into the people in the organization who are to be affected by the proposed changes. The people in the organization are an integral part of the implementation of the changes needed for the district to improve, and they are critical to the intervention's success. When the state takes over a school district, it cannot forget that there are people in it. It cannot forget the importance of those people in achieving its vision. It cannot forget that its vision must become their vision.

Leadership styles are important in balancing the need for control after a takeover with gaining commitment from the organization's members. The findings from the study support a strong need for consistency of styles of the leadership with a decided preference toward the interpersonal/managerial style. The organization's members want strong leaders who will "do what is right even under pressure", and who also possess humanistic qualities and acknowledge the needs of the organization's members as human beings. Given the fear and intimidation which was predominant in the old culture, the authoritative/adversarial style was not conducive to developing the climate which the organization's members wanted, and which the state needed, to accomplish its goals. Acknowledging that no leadership style is used exclusively, the author concludes that leaders whose predominant style is interpersonal/managerial/collaborative are

best suited to address the issues of an intervention and an organization like the Jersey City Public Schools.

The intervention team is responsible for implementation of the takeover and operation of the district under a new form of governance. The team is critical to the success of the takeover, and expectations for team members are extremely high. Members of the intervention team must have exceptional credentials, credibility, and management skills; sound knowledge of administrative and educational best practices; exemplary professional and ethical standards; and great physical endurance, emotional strength, and self-confidence. They must complement each other in their styles and work together as a solid, cohesive team. They must be committed to a multi-perspective approach to the organization as the means to achieving the primary goal of the intervention, that of developing an organization which is capable of believing in, and achieving, a commitment to the education of children first. They must be organizational and educational strategists, and their repetoire of skills must include the ability to analyze and interpret the organization's culture and gain commitment of its members to develop a new culture. Ultimately, as the district's new leadership, it is the state intervention team which must work within the district and community to turn a political process into educational solutions, thereby making the intervention team the critical link to success or failure of the takeover in any district.

MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

The consistency of the literature and research in the field, and the findings of the study, enable the author to make recommendations to inform the field. The recommendations are presented below as guidelines for policymakers, administrators, and state and local educational agencies to consider in the development of policy and planning for implementation of local school district interventions.

Recommendations Related to Policy

1. Policymakers must understand that intervention in and of itself is not a solution, for the real work begins after the policy is enacted. Policies related to state accountability systems and intervention must reflect this thinking because they will greatly determine the success or failure of intervention in a school district and any desired outcomes. The credibility, viability and success of the entire intervention process begins with the development of policy, particularly as it relates to standards, monitoring, accountability, and intervention itself. The need for the intervention never stops being questioned and debated. Therefore, the standards, processes and data used to determine that need are continually subjected to close scrutiny. The data, based upon state standards, is gathered from the state's monitoring process and will be used as the basis to intervene, to plan intervention activities, and ultimately to measure progress and effectiveness of the intervention. The type of data gathered should, therefore, be carefully considered, as should their validity as determinants of the need for intervention and as measures of its success in educational as well as bureaucratic terms. The policies should be designed not only to enable the state to take over and operate a school district but also to provide appropriate data and processes which will enable successful implementation of activities to ensure educational improvement and organizational development as well as corrective action. The monitoring process and accountability system cannot be separated from the intervention itself, and the intervention experience should provide feedback into the entire process to fine-tune it for use in other districts. The feedback loop must be complete if the state truly wants to learn from the intervention and make it a viable strategy to improve school districts and the education they provide.

2. The state's accountability system should be based upon definitions of accountability and educational effectiveness, with multiple indicators which reflect not only

compliance with state procedural mandates but also with the quality of governance and leadership; teaching, learning and student achievement; use of fiscal resources to achieve educational outcomes; and community support for educational programs and services. Local school districts should be studied and given the opportunity to participate in developing profiles and quality indicators of effective school districts and schools for different types of communities. Data collected during monitoring should include the operational realities of the district and its external environment. Care must be taken so that this information is not be framed as excuses for a district not achieving state standards, but rather as valid constraints and impediments to be dealt with in planning for improvement. Measurements of accountability should provide districts with data for self-monitoring beyond the reporting data routinely required by the state, and adequate opportunity must be given to districts for self-study and improving their own status. Such opportunity should not be so open-ended that it goes on indefinitely. Timelines and benchmarks for progress are critical and must be clearly established as part of the intervention policy and process.

3. The state must determine the extent to which it is willing and able to focus on the interests of children in the broader context of social and educational issues, particularly in regard to urban centers, when addressing the issues of educational accountability and local control. The state must begin with a definition of the problem which is child-focused rather than management-focused. The definition of the problem will determine how the policy develops and how it will address educational issues. Though the policymaking rhetoric will of necessity be political, the extent to which the state truly wants to improve education for children will determine what is included in its standards, accountablity systems and intervention policies. The policymakers must not lose sight of the fact that the policy will eventually be implemented in a local district to better serve the children within a community. Educational professionals

and local community constituencies must be involved in the discussion related to policy development in order for the state to be cognizant of the realities of implementation at the local level and those specific areas which impede the welfare and education of children in various communities. In the end, it is the state's responsibility to ensure that the final policy maintains its focus on the education of children. How the policy is developed in terms of broad-based participation of educational professionals and constituencies at state and local levels, the consistent focus on direct benefit to children, and clarification of the state's responsibility throughout the process particularly in regard to the type of assistance it will provide to the district and community to support the intervention, are all extremely important.

4. The state must determine whether it will assume a helping role or supplant local decisions in the form of direct intervention in local district operations. If it supplants, it must make provision to clarify the degree to which it will be involved in daily district operations and specify parameters in writing which define decision-making expectations for the state and district. The helping, "technical assistance" role must be clarified with responsibilities and expectations for state and local personnel, desired outcomes and progress benchmarks, and implementation timelines for activities clearly defined. Direct intervention, a "swat team" model whereby key district administrative staff are replaced with state-appointed personnel, may show immediate gains, but the state must eventually deal with the ultimate return to local control. Regardless of the approach it chooses, the state must be prepared with concrete answers to questions regarding the basis upon which return to local control will be determined and the process which will be used for transition and ultimate withdrawal of the state from the district. Whether the state uses the supplanting or helping approach, it must consider the capacity of the district to eventually function on its own with minimal technical assistance. Unless it is prepared to stay in the district indefinitely, the state must develop a

policy which provides for a clear cut strategic plan to ensure that all mandates and activities, especially those related to organizational development and community involvement, are directed toward district capacity building and ultimate withdrawal of the state. The strategic plan should be developed with broad-based involvement of key constituencies and include a system of checks and balances to prevent the recurrence of the historical problems which led to state intervention. It is conceivable, depending upon the district, that the state may need to indefinitely continue a presence in the district to provide direct oversight of some district operations, particularly in the areas of personnel and finance.

5. The state should assume financial responsibility for the intervention and have a plan for capacity building with financial assistance provided by the state as the intervention proceeds. It is safe to assume that most districts which require intervention are experiencing severe financial difficulties because of inadequate resources, not just fiscal mismanagement. It logically follows that such districts will require substantial up-front funding to address problems from many years of neglect. Facility upgrades, capital improvements, and bringing instructional equipment and materials up to adequate levels all require a massive infusion of funds, funds which the local community often cannot provide. Negative reaction to the takeover is exacerbated when long-standing, visible problems are not quickly corrected and the community may be asked to raise taxes to support an increased school budget which addresses the deficiencies. Though the community wants these problems corrected, they see the responsibility for financial support for improvements which they cannot afford resting with the state. Interest groups try to confuse the public by pointing out how the state intervention itself is actually increasing costs. Though fiscal mismanagement is often a major contributing factor to school district failure, the state should not be naive in taking a position that improved fiscal management alone will enable the resources to be directed in adequate amounts to cover

massive costs associated with filling long-standing gaps while fixed and other costs continue to increase. A reasonable plan for the state to provide funds directly to the district, not the municipality, on a declining scale while the district improves its fiscal management practices will preserve the principles of sound fiscal management and accountability, which is important to the state, while displaying a gesture of good will and support to the community. This approach would also be more realistic in addressing critical problems which can only be solved quickly with an infusion of additional funds since it could take two to three years to establish sound fiscal practices and accountability in a troubled district. In that amount of time, many problems could be addressed and much debate could be avoided if the state would provide some degree of special financial assistance to the district to begin to level the playing field.

6. The intervention policy must be carefully developed to include two critical factors. First, it must provide reasonable timelines for implementation of mandated activities and sufficient managerial latitude to the intervention team to adjust activities in order to ensure adequate assessment, strategic planning and effective implementation. In addition, the time period provided for the district to be state-operated must be sufficient to address systemic problems, develop roots for cultural transformation, and bring about reasonable progress in student achievement upon which the district can build. It may take several years just to develop an infrastructure for organizational and educational improvement which will position the district to make the student achievement gains it needs. The intervention needs at least ten years, with the second five years likely being the time when significant student achievement gains will be realized. Second, the policy must address the issues of the district's budget and financial responsibility and expectations for the state, the district, and the municipality. There must be provision for bonding for capital improvements. Further, the appeals process which may be used by the municipality to challenge the state-operated district's budget must provide

for a process and efficient timelines which enable the district to continue to function and make needed improvements, and not be paralyzed by continuous budget appeals and litigation. It must be remembered that the politics continues long after the takeover. The district budget and local taxes become political platforms and issues at local and state levels. The policy must be developed to provide for a budget appeals process which is fair to both the municipality and the state-operated district, and efficient in reaching the most expeditious resolution. If the state provides some special financial assistance to offset initial budgetary increases, much of the battling over the district budget will be minimized. It would also diffuse local municipal leaders' arguments and save time, human resources, and money in pursuing legal arguments regarding the district's budget. The state-operated district cannot afford to waste precious energy and resources on numerous legal battles while attempting to address the district's needs. It represents another costly diversion to the intervention effort.

7. The state must consider, as difficult as it may be given the newsworthiness of state interventions, the negative publicity and media attention on the district and community. "Bad press" adds to the negative feelings toward the intervention by stigmatizing the district, the staff, and the community. It feeds the arguments of the intervention's opponents and makes them stronger, and it alienates those who may have favored intervention, hoped for improvement and could have been allies and supporters of change. It creates a self-image problem for the district and community which breeds resentment and becomes another barrier to successful implementation. The state must attempt to substantiate its case for intervention in a district without painting the entire district and community as negative. Without threatening its case, the state must find some strengths to point out, some positive attributes. Even though this may be difficult when the case for intervention is being argued, it is imperative that the state, and later the intervention team, focus on specific reasons for district problems and

acknowledge that the district, its staff, and the community are not "all bad". This message is critical. It can and should be delivered honestly, highlighting anything positive along with the negative, with the state emphasizing how it will assist the district and community to build upon the positive. It is imperative that the self-worth and pride of the people living and working in the district and community not suffer because of the acts of a relative few.

Recommendations Related to Planning and Management

1. The state must have in place at the time of its arrival, prior to its arrival if possible, a public relations program and communication system which quickly disseminates accurate information to all constituent groups. The importance of information throughout the takeover never diminishes as various interest groups continually use the media and public fora to debate their positions. A public information team is a must, especially in the early stages, not only to project the district's new vision and progress in a systematic campaign, but also to read the district and community, anticipate areas where information needs are greatest, and develop formal and informal networks with the media, staff and community. The public information team must be highly skilled, preferably headed by someone who knows the community well. The public information officer is a critical position in terms of promoting positive public relations and efficient communication, and saving the intervention team from dealing with the issues and activities which can divert much of its energy and attention. The public information officer can help place the intervention team in a pro-active rather than a reactive stance and keep it there.

2. The state must develop a strategic planning and management system prior to the intervention which will systematically guide the intervention team through the processes which are critical to planning and implementation. A corrective action plan based upon deficiencies noted from the monitoring which occurred prior to takeover is not sufficiently

pro-active as it tends to be remedial in nature, focusing efforts on a narrow scope of identified problems and not moving beyond to areas of organizational growth and development, and educational improvement strategies. The strategic planning and management system must include environmental scanning; development of the district's mission and strategic policies; a strategic planning process; development of systems and procedures; and processes for internal monitoring, evaluating and reporting progress. With a strategic management system in place, the intervention team will be better able to maintain its focus and remain on course as they are impacted by the constant barrage of problems and issues. The team will also need a short-term work plan based upon known deficiencies and identified problems in order to proceed quickly and guide its actions when it enters the district. The plan must be dynamic and modified as additional needs are identified and clarified. The pre-intervention monitoring reports, no matter how thorough, will only scratch the surface as compared to what will be discovered once the team is in the district. The initial work plan should be made public to gain broad understanding that the strategic planning and management system will allow for involvement of various constituencies in subsequent strategic planning activities. As soon as possible, key constituent groups should become involved in the planning process.

3. Baseline data to plan and measure progress of the intervention must be collected as soon as possible. These data should not focus solely on pre-intervention monitoring reports. Quantitative and qualitative data should be collected during the early months of the intervention to scan the environment and get a current, accurate reading in areas which were covered in the monitoring reports as well as other areas in the organization, particularly the schools. The focus should be on using the data to identify systemic problems and to develop a strategic plan which not only addresses short-term remediation of problems but which also pro-actively enhances and improves all areas of the organization, especially the schools,

instruction and direct services to children. The intervention team will likely not have time to adequately conduct a thorough data collection and analysis without assistance. The state department should be prepared to provide a separate team to work with the intervention team on a short-term basis for purposes of data collection and analysis as part of district assessment and planning in the early stages of the takeover. Data collection and analysis should occur periodically thereafter to determine progress and to modify plans as needed.

4. A progress tracking and reporting system must be developed and implemented as part of strategic planning and management to document activities and systematically report information and progress to the state, community, and public-at-large in timely fashion. The reporting mechanism should be publicized as part of the intervention plan so that the various constituencies know that they will be receiving timely progress reports with opportunities for public input and comment. It is critical that the intervention team protect itself from a perception of slanting or in any way hiding information. The team must be perceived as communicative, open and honest. The team must prevent conflicting reports which lead to mistrust, unnecessary tension and conflict; and which divert their energies and are counterproductive to intervention efforts.

5. If the state chooses a "swat-team" approach, the intervention team should be small in number with key positions consisting of the superintendent, assistant superintendent(s), business administrator, personnel director, public information officer, and general legal counsel. Specific expertise on the team must include strategic planning, curriculum planning and development, instructional services, and organizational development. One or more administrative assistants will also be needed for investigation and follow-up activities. The team should be intact from the outset and have ample time prior to takeover to receive training in key areas and to plan for the initial phase of the intervention. There is no

time for gaps in the team's efforts from the moment they walk into the district. The expectations for extraordinary performance of the intervention team, and the demanding nature of their roles, places tremendous pressure on them to be flawless in carrying out their responsibilities. These leaders are not expected to be, nor can they be, ordinary educational administrators. Their professional skills and personal characteristics must be exceptional, and their leadership styles must be capable of meshing as a team in order to provide the consistency needed to bring stability to an organization which will undergo rapid changes and experience a high degree of uncertainty for an extended period of time.

6. If a "swat-team" approach is used, the state must be prepared to provide substantial technical assistance to the team and maintain some technical assistance efforts in the district after return to local control. Insertion of a small team of administrators alone, no matter how highly qualified, into a hostile takeover of a district with deep-rooted problems will not be sufficient to swiftly address the multitude of problems encountered. A school district takeover is a labor-intensive effort which poses great demands on the team physically, mentally and emotionally. Without adequate help, the team must simultaneously implement the mandates of the law within tight timelines, perform day-to-day operations and crisis intervention activities, assess district needs and conduct strategic planning activities, and deal with the political environment which is exacerbated by the takeover. The state should have several technical assistance teams ready to work with the intervention team on specific areas which must be addressed quickly. The technical assistance teams must be placed in the district for sufficient time periods to conduct specific activities and complete tasks. The intervention team needs hands-on assistance and access to additional resources as needed. This is particularly critical during the first year of the intervention. Without such assistance, the intervention team is forced to spread itself thin and continually juggle multiple priorities resulting in its

attention for the first two years being focused almost exclusively on those areas which must be immediately addressed: implementation of the mandated activities of the Takeover Law, the day-to-day crises which inevitably arise in a complex school district, and responding to various requests from the state level which are unique to a state-operated district. This delays some activities, dilutes others, and overloads the team to the point where they can burnout and become ineffective. The team needs intensive direct assistance from the state department and a strategy to fulfill its responsibilities, maintain itself, and deal with the issue of its own wellness and continued effectiveness.

7. The intervention team must have at its disposal a cadre of legal specialists on an as needed basis to deal with the legal issues related to implementation of the law as well as those which surface as the intervention team identifies the numerous problems which require legal advice and action. The team will be subjected to many legal problems occurring quickly and simultaneously. Timely, solid advice is required to settle issues, make decisions, and initiate legal actions so that the intervention may maintain its momentum. The team and the state cannot afford major legal errors. Not only can such errors be costly in terms of time, money, compounding problems, and creating additional problems, but the embarrassment in the wake of an intervention designed to correct ineptitude could create negative side effects which the team would have to deal with for a long time.

8. The intervention team must include in their planning a comprehensive strategy to address school-level improvement and self-renewal immediately after takeover. This may be difficult because the activities required by the policy may focus the team's attention and energies at the district level for the first year or two. However, it is critical that the school- and classroom-levels not get lost in the myriad of demands made on the team in the early stages of the takeover. If the intervention team is unable to address school-level

improvement in the early stages, they will likely not be able to do it systematically for one or two years. Unless positive changes are quickly visible at the school level, there will be a perception that changes have not occurred at all or at the level which is most important - - - that closest to the students. More importantly, the longer it takes to address school-level improvement, the longer the delay for seeing gains in student achievement. The intervention team may need a special technical assistance team from the state department to work with them to begin to address the schools while the district-level activities mandated by the takeover policy are being implemented.

Recommendations Related to Leadership

1. The concept of leadership, and the role played by the intervention team in particular, is key to the success of the intervention. This is not to diminish the importance of the state-appointed superintendent as the primary leadership role, but the intervention process is far too complex to rely upon belief in one person, particularly since that individual's unprecedented power can be quickly neutralized or compromised by the political environment at both the local and state levels. Selection of the state-appointed superintendent, however, is critical. There is a tendency to seek high-profile people for high-visibility roles. Conversely, high-profile people tend to seek high visibility roles. The state, therefore, must exercise caution in its selection of the state-appointed superintendent. The state needs a strategic leader, not a symbolic leader. Charisma and meteoric rises on the career ladder, or membership in a specific racial or ethnic group, may not be the most important considerations as qualifications for the very special leader needed to meet the demands of spearheading the intervention. It is true that the credentials of the state-appointed superintendent will be closely scrutinized and therefore must be exemplary, and that race or ethnicity may be a factor related to easing initial acceptance of a new leader in a community. However, beyond the racial/ethnic factor, and the

paper credentials and experience which may mirror that of many successful administrators, there are essential qualities which require looking far deeper into the individual. Assuming administrative expertise at the very least, the state-appointed superintendent must have extraordinary integrity, stability, and psychological strength. As the primary leader of the intervention, the state-appointed superintendent must at all times, by example and deed, maintain the district's focus on its mission and be strong enough not to succumb to the pressures or enticements of the political environment at the local or state level. All members of the intervention team, but the state-appointed superintendent in particular, must without exception "do the right things for the right reasons" and model the behaviors desired for the organization's members.

2. The intervention team must address leadership and management of the organization as a cohesive unit. The team must develop specific strategies to deal with the dynamics of the organization and the community, particularly the pressure of internal and external political forces as special interest groups challenge their authority, debate a range of old and new issues, attempt to co-opt and manipulate them by using the internal political power system, divert their attention, and try to influence their opinions and decisions. The intervention team must be unified and consistent in their approaches to the organization. Collaboration and teamwork is essential. It is critical that they continually share information so that they are able to piece together what is happening in the organization and have a complete picture at all times, minimizing gaps of critical information and confusion which could easily result from the overwhelming amount of information which must be efficiently and effectively communicated. Members of the team must support each other publicly, and provide support to each other emotionally as well as in fulfillment of their respective roles. Loyalty to the team becomes important, however, it must be kept in perspective. The ultimate loyalty is to the

fulfillment of the mission of the intervention and to the commitment made to the public trust. Intervention team members will be confronted with moral dilemmas and ultimately must follow their conscience in regard to their individual actions and loyalties.

3. The intervention team must be careful not to display a "we" and "they" attitude toward members of the organization. Though this may be difficult in the initial stages of the intervention, the team must as soon as possible find ways to identify individuals within the district and community who will support change and improvement. The team must nurture their loyalty and include them in the change process. As time goes on, the team must work toward cohesiveness of the total organization. They must be viewed as leaders who can maintain their objectivity and must demonstrate a willingness to trust and respect people in the organization, and involve them in the decision-making process and the rebuilding of their school district. Long-term, the perception of the "we-they" attitude is destructive as it is viewed by members of the organization as a lack of trust in them and as a professional and personal affront. The questions of who to trust, how much, and with what information are critical ones for the team which never totally leave them. Given the hostile nature of the takeover, the far-reaching tentacles of the numerous networks, and the high stakes, the team has sufficient reason to be cautious. However, the team must, as soon as possible, begin to take some risks and allow staff to see that they are working toward becoming one organization; that they are not setting themselves apart as gatekeepers; and that they can judge staff members as individuals, respect their opinions, and trust them. Members of the organization expect and accept a certain amount of professional distance by the intervention team but resent it when they perceive it as a sign of mistrust in them. To achieve such a balance is difficult for a team which must consider so many things in a hostile takeover. However, the team needs and must gain the support of the staff and community. This cannot be left to chance. The team must have a strategy to identify its allies and

enemies and gain support while remaining comfortable with the sensitive role it must play in the organization as representatives of "the State".

4. The team must develop from the outset vehicles for broad-based participation of constituencies in the decision-making process. A takeover is a top-down, coercive action which people feel is imposed upon them. The resistance is great based upon that alone. How the staff and community are included in the intervention process is critical to minimizing resistance to changes. The intervention plan should include provision for task forces, steering committees and other representative constituent groups to work with intervention team members on correction of district problems and strategic planning. Without such structures in place, the lack of participation of staff, parents and community-at-large in the decision-making process will become a major issue in itself which will haunt the team throughout the intervention and impact every activity it attempts to implement.

The intervention team, and the state-appointed superintendent in particular, must develop a positive working relationship with municipal, community, union and business leaders who are potential enemies and allies. They all represent individuals and groups with vested interests. Municipal and community leaders will likely be "anti-takeover" and thereby adversaries with whom the leadership must reckon. Business leaders are more likely to be supporters of the intervention as they link the importance of improved schools to the economic prosperity of the community. Whenever possible and appropriate, these leaders should become part of the decision-making process. The team, in its dealings with municipal and community leaders, must be politically astute but careful not to be perceived as "political". If this line is crossed, even in perception, allegations that "only names and faces have changed" will quickly surface, and the integrity of the team and the intervention is jeopardized.

Union leaders are often powerful political figures with extensive networks which

go far beyond their constituencies. They clearly have vested interests which are as much individual as constituent-based. The unions also provide a power-base for individuals who may not necessarily be the leaders and function behind the scenes using the informal system to fight for influence and control. Contract enforcement and negotiations are basic issues for the intervention team to face. As the team makes changes, applies policies uniformly, and enforces the contracts it will likely have to deal with a glut of grievances which can consume the time and energies of staff considerably. The grievance procedure may be used as a union strategy for addressing old issues, testing the state, and deliberately tying up the team with time-consuming hearings. In any event, grievances will result because numerous conflicts are unavoidable as the intervention presses forward and addresses long-standing employee practices. Given the nature of bargaining, union leaders may perceive the opportunity to negotiate with and confront "the State" as an attractive challenge which makes the prospects for a "win" even more important. Regardless of any overt gestures in support of takeover, the unions will look to challenge the state at every turn. A "win" on any matter validates their prowess and power. Even if the unions support the takeover, they must by their nature enter into an ongoing power struggle with the intervention team who represent "the State". The team must have a strategy for developing a positive working relationship with the unions while not being consumed by their demands and power plays. Dissemination of information and open lines of communication with union leaders to anticipate and resolve problems without formal action are critical. Whenever possible and appropriate, unions should become part of the decision-making process. Unless the intervention policy provides for changes to existing employee contracts, the intervention team will be legally bound to abide by them. It would not be surprising, given the political history of many failing districts, that contracts between unions and previous administrations would be liberally tilted toward practices which provide protection, benefits and working conditions for employees

which are excessive and not in the best interests of the district and the education of children. The intervention team will have to respect the existing contracts but should be prepared to renegotiate those areas which directly impact educational program and service delivery to children. Employee contracts will likely be a major impediment to the changes needed most to positively impact instruction and student achievement.

5. If the intervention policy provides for a non-voting advisory Board of Education, the intervention team must be prepared to deal with the same kinds of issues that typically occur on voting boards of education. Though the advisory board may be appointed and is non-voting, board members will still identify with one or more constituencies, will be approached by staff and community members, and will experience the same pressures to align with certain groups and issues as do voting boards. They may be even more frustrated because they do not vote and therefore feel that they are not an integral part of the decision-making process. The team will have to deal with their issues, concerns and personalities just like any other board of education. It is critical that training of the board in the responsibilities of their roles begin immediately and continue throughout the intervention. Members of the board should become involved in specific tasks as soon as possible, playing key roles in task forces, steering committees and other vehicles used to increase participation in governance and decision-making processes. It should not be assumed that they will automatically be supportive of the state because they sought their positions and may have even been appointed by the state. As individuals they, too, will likely have their own vested interests, or those of an identified constituency, and therefore can divert the team's efforts as much as any other individuals or group. The team must have a strategy for the board of education to develop as an effectively functioning body with legitimate responsibilities and a willingness to support a unified effort to improve the school district.

6. The intervention team must be cognizant of the importance of jobs and personnel matters in the organization. Hiring personnel from the outside is a major source of resentment within the organization and community who see it as an insult to their competency as well as jobs being taken from them. This has strong implications for the intervention team. Anyone hired by the team is associated with them and the takeover, is subject to close scrutiny by "insiders" as to credentials and performance, and will need special support as they adjust and confront resistance as "outsiders". Hiring practices established by the team will be a major issue. Selection of personnel, even from within the organization, will present a major source of ongoing problems for the team. It is critical that they develop and communicate widely a clear, fair, and consistent process for selection and promotion of personnel which enables mobility from within the organization but also encourages qualified candidates from outside the district to be sought and considered. It must be noted that the process will continually be challenged and that its clarity and consistency in application will be the key to its defensibility. Beyond the process, it is critical that the team carefully select personnel who not only possess excellent professional qualifications, but who also have the personal attributes which will enable them to handle the pressures of their role in the intervention and the human dynamics of the organization. Human relations skills are key. As an extension of the team, personnel selected by them must be willing and able to mesh with them and be aligned with their approach to the organization. If they do not perform as expected, the team must be prepared to take swift and appropriate action against them, even remove them, or risk their own credibility in the area of expectations for staff performance. The team cannot be perceived as having different performance expectations for, or even protecting, "their people".

7. The intervention team must not lose sight of the fact that the takeover is an action which is intended to open a district to improvements and must therefore be viewed as a

means to an end. The team must be prepared for a long, tough war with innumerable skirmishes and major battles as they attempt to change and manage a complex organization within a highly political context. The team must be committed to a flexible multi-perspective approach to understanding and managing organizations, one which integrates the structural, human, political and cultural dimensions of the organization. If the state's intervention policy only considers and applies structural solutions to the district's problems, which is likely to be the case, the team will begin at a disadvantage because it will be consumed with the technical tasks mandated by the policy which only address one dimension of the organization. Ideally, the state's intervention policy would take into consideration all dimensions of an organization in its mandated activities, allowing reasonable timelines that enable the team to plan and implement activities which address complex organizational issues and the systemic needs of the organization. However, given the bureaucratic orientation of most policymakers, the policy will likely emphasize technical and structural solutions. Structural changes alone will not transform the organization and provide an environment for effective reform and continued improvement, particularly if the goal is ultimately to return the district to local control. New organizational structures and control systems will be short-lived unless the intervention transforms the organization to a new and higher level of stability, order, values and beliefs. Unless the organization's culture is significantly changed to reflect values and norms of behavior which will sustain and promote continued improvement, and appropriate checks and balances are moved into place to maintain a balance of power, the district will likely ultimately revert back to pre-takeover status once returned to local control. The intervention team must, therefore, develop a comprehensive strategy for planned, managed change which focuses on organizational transformation and development. The focus must be on the techniques and processes for achieving organizational transformation by developing skills among staff which

enable them to systematically study and diagnose their own organizational problems and resolve them. The team must analyze the characteristics of the organization to determine its capacity to change, and improve the organizational climate in which people work. The strategy for organizational transformation must develop an organization which is characterized by a common sense of purpose, cohesiveness and collaboration, innovativeness and creative problem solving, self-actualization and growth, and the ability to continually adapt to a dynamic environment. In order to achieve this, the intervention team must adopt an approach to management which stresses functional administrative structures and appropriate, effective organizational behavior. It must design flexible organizational structures which replace the rigidity of the hierarchical structure with adaptive decision-making processes and mechanisms to deal with conflict in a productive, problem-solving environment. The team must focus on the organization's members as the key to the district maintaining itself internally after the district is returned to local control.

8. The intervention team's approach to the organization and its members is extremely important and may be the single most critical factor in the success of the intervention. Team members must complement each other's leadership style and be consistent in dealing with the organization's members to achieve mutual alignment and joint action toward common goals. The leaders must develop an understanding of the culture in order to gain insight into the people in the organization, how they may be impacted by changes and how they will react, and how this will affect implementation activities. When the state takes over a school district, it cannot ignore the importance of the people in it, and they cannot be ignored in the intervention process. The team must anticipate and consider what happens to the people in the organization during the intervention process, keeping in mind the hierarchy of human needs: physiological, safety, belongingness, esteem and self-actualization. When a takeover occurs, no

matter what degree of satisfaction was experienced at each level previously, a person's equilibrium is disrupted. She/He gets reshuffled and the most basic needs become critical again. Physical and mental health needs related to stress, job security and survival become personal priorities. Dismantling of organizational units to which people felt a sense of ownership and belonging is traumatic. Self-esteem is diminished when people are closely connected with failure and have their work, abilities and intentions closely scrutinized. Self-actualization is difficult to achieve under such conditions, though it is the self-actualized worker that the organization needs. The approach of the intervention team to organizational transformation and development requires managing and changing the culture and addressing members' needs. The team can address both during the intervention by considering the specific recommendations which follow.

(a) The team must pay attention to the cultural aspects of the organization by looking at the social and environmental contexts for clues to the culture and norms of behavior. Any uncertainty on the part of the organization's members should be minimized by providing information and helping members understand why things are happening, avoiding surprises, and giving advance notice whenever possible. Consistency and support should be provided to ease members through times of flux and difficulty. Communications should be open with ample opportunities to frequently and comfortably exchange information.

(b) Every attempt should be made to minimize the staff's feelings that they are still being "monitored" by the intervention team. Self-monitoring should be emphasized. The takeover should be played down as a past event and a focus placed on positive district activities and the district's potential for future success.

(c) The importance of staff needs, feelings, and opinions should be readily and openly acknowledged. The team should let staff know that they are listening to them. Staff should

be treated with respect, dignity, courtesy, and fairness. The team must work hard at building trust and mutual respect.

(d) The team must be sensitive to the history of the district. They should listen to staff to learn what has gone right and wrong in the past from their various perspectives and judge their validity and relevance independently. The staff must feel that the team views their history as significant and that there is a sincere willingness on the part of the team to learn from it. By listening to staff, the team will not only gain insight into reasons for the successes or failures of the district but will also become aware of the sensitive issues in the district and community which may impact implementation activities. These issues will not go away automatically because of takeover and could be exacerbated if they are not known to the team and carefully handled.

(e) The team must identify points of organizational stress and be sensitive to the resultant health and physical concerns of staff. Strategies and activities must be used to address organizational stress and staff wellness.

(f) The team must be ever-cognizant of the inward nature of staff and the strong suspicion of "outsiders" in order to understand and deal with attitudes and behaviors toward "newcomers". They must be aware of potential interpersonal problems; build skills in human relations, collaboration and conflict resolution; and take every opportunity to support and enforce teamwork.

(g) The team must continually work on clarification of staff roles and responsibilities, and where members "fit" in the restructured organization and the "bigger picture". They must make clear their expectations for performance and productivity, model appropriate norms for work and performance, provide constructive feedback on performance, and encourage self-evaluation and self-improvement. Innovation and "risk-taking" should be

encouraged and there should be a focus on collaborative problem-solving. The team must formally recognize and reward good performance and take necessary action against poor performance. Personal and professional growth must also be encouraged. Opportunities to learn, to grow, and to experience the world outside the district and community should be provided. Fear, intimidation and blame must be replaced by trust, respect, self-management and personal accountability. The team must build pride, self-esteem, and job satisfaction among the organization's members.

(h) The team must develop a strategy to deal with the shifts in power and authority which occur at the time of the takeover and become more critical after the mandated restructuring and reorganization. They should anticipate conflict, develop mechanisms to deal with it swiftly and consistently, and establish norms for appropriate behavior when conflict arises.

(i) The team should emphasize use of the formal channels of communication and established protocol within the organization. Knowing that the informal structure will continue to operate, the team must understand how the informal structure works. It must know the groups and networks, their power bases, and the extent of their influence; but the team must continue to emphasize use of the formal structure as the standard practice.

(j) The team must conduct planned organizational development activities as part of the strategy to develop organizational cohesiveness, shared values, new beliefs, and productive norms of behavior which will ultimately lead to a new culture and a healthy organization which is capable of withstanding the powerful internal and external forces it will inevitably face when returned to local control.

RETROSPECTIVE

As the author reflects upon the five years of the Jersey City experience, the accounts of the Paterson Public Schools and the prelude to the takeover of the Newark Public Schools, she sees even greater relevance of the study's findings, conclusions and recommendations. The issues and debates connected with the state's intervention in the three New Jersey school districts are consistent. If one listens carefully, beneath the fleeting references to children in the flurry of opinions and accusations, one comes to understand that these districts are captives of political systems and cultures, and that the debate is not about the welfare and education of children but rather about power, control, and vested interests. The ease with which the takeover debate can be diverted from what makes the most sense educationally, when the education of children is supposed to be the central issue, is a phenomenon of politics. Typically, the arguments are so heavily laden with the vested interests of adults that the children are almost incidental in the debate, though they are occasionally skillfully brought into it to evoke emotion and bolster one's position. Local school districts and municipal governments, no matter how desperate their situations, simply do not want to relinquish their historically unchallenged local control and the benefits derived for those in power. Meanwhile, school districts continue to fail and generations of children continue to be poorly educated. The risk of doing nothing would appear to be greater than that of doing something given the inability or unwillingness of school districts to reverse their pattern of failure. State intervention can disrupt the cycle of failure and provide an opportunity for improvement. It has that potential. Its success will be determined by the ability of the state to turn the political process at both the state and local levels into educational solutions to benefit children.

In the end, there must be an advocate for the children, and that advocate must be powerful enough to meet head-on the political machinery which obstructs the education of children at both the state and local levels. The author must ask, if not the state, then who?

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